913.741
Cas

THE PREHISTORIC
OYSTER SHELL HEAPS
OF THE
DAMARISCOTTA RIVER

BY
HAROLD W. CASTNER

Harold N. Castner
Aug. 29. 1966

Photograph by Ivan Flye

View of the northern mound on the Newcastle shore, taken in 1948.
Vegetation has covered most of the deposits on each side of the river.

A Story of
THE MYSTIFYING, PREHISTORIC

OYSTER SHELL HEAPS

of the

DAMARISCOTTA RIVER

Containing records of explorations by scientists and all known data on this man-made wonder of antiquity

Together With
Pictures of the Excavations of 1886

This great deposit of over five million cubic feet of oyster shells on both sides of the Damariscotta River in Maine, has been the object of repeated investigation by scientists, but still remains a mystery of antiquity. Whatever ancient peoples discovered this abundant food supply has never been learned. But much has been found to establish certain reasonable conclusions from which the reader may presume the origin, and vaguely identify the successive tribes who occupied the area in ancient times.

First Edition 1950
Second Edition 1953
Third Edition 1956
Fourth Edition 1963

Copyright 1950
by
HAROLD W. CASTNER

Printed by
THE WALDOBORO PRESS
Waldoboro, Maine

Oyster Shell Heaps

DEPOSITS of oyster shells and other bivalves, have been found all over the earth. Most of these are in banks or mounds, and some are covered by vegetation to a greater or lesser extent, making their discovery accidental. Many of these have been exposed to view due to erosion of river banks and shorelines, where water has continued its never ending encroachment on the land.

Thousands of deposits have been noted on every continent, ranging from a small pile to great masses which are of such proportion that they form a feature of the landscape. Many of the larger deposits have been known for years and have been explored by scientists and visited by tourists. Some of the largest known are on the peninsula of Denmark. Others of nearly equal size are found in Japan, Florida and in British Columbia. For some time it was thought these were natural deposits which were river and even ocean beds, which had been raised by some geological upheaval exposing them to view. Widespread investigation soon proved this to be untrue. Investigators found all sorts of implements, bones, crude utensils and even skeletons, to show that these were heaps of cast off shells of those shellfish whose succulent parts were consumed by some previous race of humans.

Of all these interesting deposits throughout the world, new England holds the spotlight, for its great deposits on the Damariscotta River in Maine, not only because a description of them would resemble all others of this kind, but because they are nearly, if not quite, the largest shell heaps in the world.

The Damariscotta River is an arm of the sea, situated between the Kennebec and Penobscot Rivers. Fourteen miles from its mouth it passes under a bridge which connects the Twin towns of Newcastle and Damariscotta. A

mile above this, the river narrows perceptably and swift currents carry it through treacherous channels. All along this area the maximum width is not more than a hundred yards. At this point it takes a sharp bend westward and opens into a large bay nearly two miles long and half a mile wide. Here it stops as salt water, but receives the fresh water of the Damariscotta Lake, which is situated just beyond the little village of Damariscotta Mills.

At the bend of the river, just mentioned, the deposit of oyster shells is continuous on both sides for over three hundred yards. There are five major mounds and many smaller deposits ranging from a few bushels to many tons.

These mounds have been known to white men since the days of the earliest explorers. Gilbert and Popham, as well as Captains George Weymouth, Martin Pring, John Smith and Sir Ferdinando Gorges, were all exploring this area shortly after the year 1600 A.D., and each explorer was visited by a large delegation of Wawenock Indians, who invited them to visit the Great Bashaba, who was the peace-time ruler of the whole Abenaki State. A location was always given as North of Pemaquid, where the great shell heaps were located. Owing to the abundance of food at this point, it is quite certain this was the chief settlement of the Wawenocks.

The larger deposits on either side of the river could not escape notice, and particularly those on the western bank, just below the bend in the river. On this peninsula they extend in a steep bank formation for over four hundred feet, and are fully exposed to view from the river. The northern portion of this particular mound is some four feet thick, but being located on higher ground, it has the appearance of uniform depth, but the southern part extends over much lower ground and is about thirty-one feet deep. This exceeds the height of any similar deposit in the entire world. Vegetation has crept over these deposits, making it difficult to define the exact length and breadth of them. Portions of

this great mass extend some seventy-five feet inland and beyond this are lesser deposits, the examination of which is difficult due to roots and trees which have grown over them in all directions.

Modern examination reveals the enormous losses which it has suffered by erosion from tides since ancient times. This is more noticeable along the beach which lies in front of them. Here, the shells are packed up in almost vertical formations. It is very evident that this was not the original formation, as the land must have extended farther out into the river, at which time the shells were thrown in the original piles. As erosion continued, the shells in this bank fell down until we note a long beach of fine white shells which have crumbled by action of water and ice.

For many generations, since the white man has occupied this area, these shells have been removed in great quantities for walks, roads and other purposes. Teams, carts, and even scows, have carried away hundreds of tons and yet the enormity of the deposit seems to change but little.

In the year 1886, a syndicate of Boston men, conceived the idea of converting this enormous supply into lime. They contacted the Damariscotta Town Clerk, Mr. E. R. Castner, and arranged to have him gather and ship two barrels of shells for analysis. The result must have been satisfactory, as operations were started and a great factory for processing the shells was erected, at a cost of over ten-thousand dollars. This factory was built on the eastern shore, on land owned by Mrs. Mary P. L. Stetson. The great deposits on the western shore were owned by William Taylor Glidden who preferred to preserve them for posterity as a natural curiosity.

Previous to this commercial enterprise, Professor F. W. Putnam, of the Peabody Museum, at Cambridge, Mass-

achusetts, had made extensive explorations and examination of this deposit, in conjunction with the distinguished scientists, Jeffries Wyman and Edward S. Morse. Valuable information was obtained and a fair quantity of relics. They felt that if the mounds could be uncovered at greater depths, it would reveal more interesting knowledge of the possibility of origin, and shed more light on the mystery of this ancient wonder, and particularly, information which might make it possible to compute the age of these deposits.

Hearing of the proposed mill and commercial enterprise, Professor Putnam, immediately contacted the men who were to operate the business and purchased all rights to whatever relics might be uncovered. Mr. Abram Tarr Gamage of Damariscotta, a local antiquarian, was engaged to be constantly on the ground, for the purpose of taking all sorts of notes and data, measurements and information, in addition to relics of any kind or description which might be found.

Within the text are the official pictures which Mr. Gamage had taken of the great Whaleback Mound on the western shore. In the foreground of one picture may be seen the barrels, which were used to ship the relics of every description which were uncovered, which included implements, pottery, bones, skeletons and all sorts of spear heads and several curious articles which could not be identified. A great quantity of valuable relics were thus preserved, but it is of interest to note that although they were shipped to the Museum, they remained unclassified for years and due to the lack of space, it is not known whether or not they have been taken from the original shipments and placed on exhibit, even to this day.

In earlier days, a lime kiln was built on the western bank, and many tons of shells were burned in an effort to extract the lime. This venture was of short duration, however, and was found to be unprofitable.

Just previous to the Civil War, Professor Chadbourne of Bowdoin College, made a thorough study of the deposits, and established for all time, conclusive proof that these shells had been left there as a result of ancient feasts, and at a time so far in the past, he dared nôt attempt computation. He found many individual piles of shells ten or fifteen feet in diameter and several feet deep. Beneath this the soil was made up of a diluvial deposit of sand, gravel and rocks, resembling the land adjacent to the deposits. There were numerous bones of animals, birds and beavers, and even a sturgeon's plate. A dark line ran through the bottom of the great mounds, showing the possibility of vegetable mould, formed during temporary abandonment of the place. Shells under this layer were decomposed, or turned to lime, as if acted upon by fire. He obtained shells of other types than the oyster and found some clam, quahaug, and several other kinds.

About a hundred yards down the river on the western band, is another large deposit extending over eight hundred feet along the shore. In some places this deposit extends inland for over seventy feet. The average depth of this is about eleven feet. This location is of particular interest, as it is situated before a natural clearing in the woods, which have been cultivated for years. A great variety of implements have been unearthed here and it is quite probable that this was the location of the Indian Settlement, and near the place where implements were made for use in peace and war. Like the other deposits farther up the peninsula, this one has lost much during the centuries. It is estimated that nearly half the deposits have wasted away.

Some idea of the uncertainty of the extent of all these deposits may be learned from the fact that when the enterprise of converting the shells into lime was contemplated, it was thought that most of the shells were on the western shore. As the owners would not sell the privilege, as pre-

viously mentioned, a last resort was to examine the eastern shore, which seemed of little promise. The accompanying pictures adequately illustrate the great volume unearthed, which came as a happy surprise to the promoters. For this reason it is doubtful if the full extent of these deposits will ever be learned. Through all the years up to 1886, it was supposed that practically all the volume of shells were on the western shore and little had been done to investigate the eastern shore and only casual attention given to it.

Examination of this newly discovered deposit revealed that the shells began at the river and extended back into the land for over three hundred feet. It was over one hundred and twenty-five feet wide and was of great depth throughout. It had the appearance of a great whale and was given the name of "Whaleback." It was over sixteen feet high and it was later learned that the deposit had been started in a depression in the land. During the time this enterprise was in operation, it was visited by hundreds of tourists and natives. People came from great distances in the summer to see this man-made wonder.

Like the previous attempt on the western shore, this enterprise was of short duration and financial difficulties compelled it to cease operation. Mr. Edward Cornelious Holmes had been the promoter of the company and he revived the plant in 1891. As the sole owner, he operated the factory during the summer of that year, but early Sunday morning, November 15th, the plant was found to be in flames and was totally consumed by fire. This great misfortune caused Mr. Holmes to lose all he possessed of worldly goods and he later spent the remainder of his life in a humble shack at Damariscotta Mills, where he suffered a stroke and was found dead by kind neighbors, who provided a decent Christian burial and so passed the last participant in commercializing this deposit of shells.

Despite the loss of hundreds of tons of shells by erosion and commercial uses, a great volume still stands exposed to view. Scientific investigation revealed that there were three distinct periods of construction of these heaps. In each case there was a period of abandonment, during which time a thick layer of vegetable mould accumulated over the shells. The lowest layer of shells extended over about one eighth of the present known area. This layer was about three feet thick, and at the base, many large tree trunks were found which had decayed to powder, leaving conical hollows around which the shells were packed. Directly above this layer was a strata of mould which was some five inches thick. It has been quite accurately determined that it takes about one hundred years to accumulate an inch of mould. We can, therefore fix the period of this first abandonment at about five hundred years.

The second layer of shells was larger and more extensive. This was about six feet thick and covered by mould to the thickness of about three inches, or, let us say, an interval of three hundred years of the second abandonment. In this second strata of mould were found trunks of large trees which were of unknown species in this climate. They were two or three feet in diameter and had grown up entirely over this second strata of shells. These trunks were better preserved than those of the first strata, but although they held their form, they easily crumbled in the hands.

The third strata of shells had a layer of about three inches of mould over it. An intimate study of this top layer of mould caused scientists to agree that it was about three hundred years ago when the last deposits were made, or at the time of the Wawenock Settlement, at this place of abundant food supply.

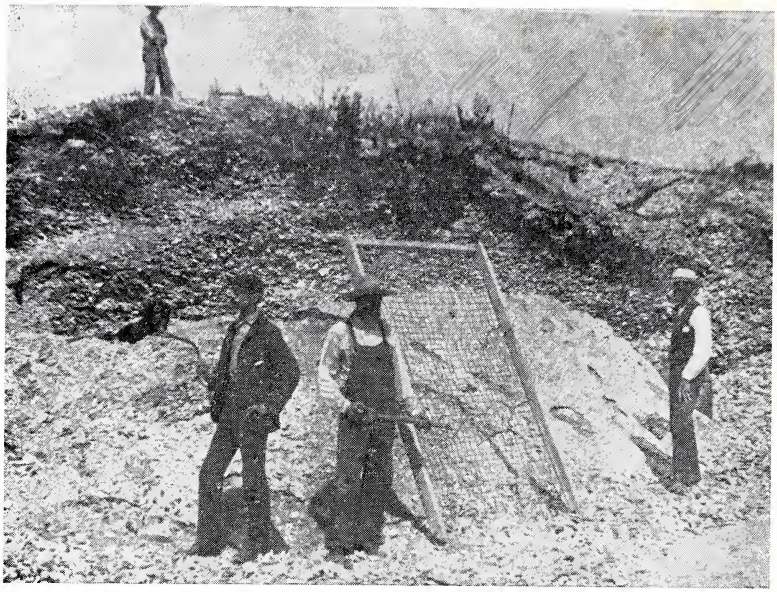
There were many evidences of aboriginal occupation scattered throughout the shells and various indications of

the character and habits of these people. In the Whaleback mound, a variety of implements were found, but not of any great quantity, due to the fact that the actual settlement was not at this spot, but somewhat removed.

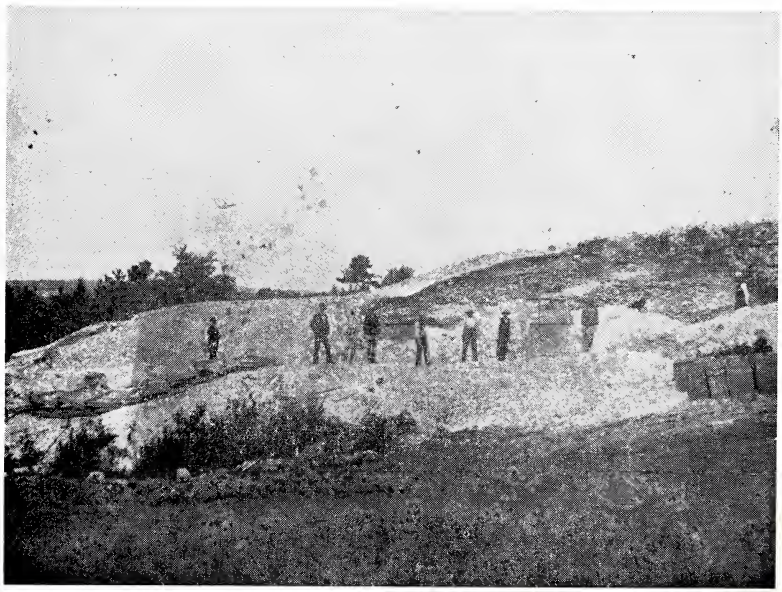
At many points among the shells were found evidences of small beds of ashes, denoting that food had been prepared and cooked there. Several fireplaces of stone were found, consisting of a half circle of rocks. Near all these were found the unmistakable evidences of savage banquets. Examination of these places revealed the bones of every known animal in these parts, including bear, lynx, wild-cat, raccoon, otter, mink, seal, skunk, rabbit, caribou and deer. Skeletons of wolves were found as well as a panther, parts of a turtle, and many other bones of fish such as smelts, alewives, sturgeons, bass, pickerel and trout. Mixed in with all this was a goodly scattering of clam, quahaug, scallop and shells of other mollusks. The animal bones seemed piled in little groups, as though they had been the residue of a primeval soup or other similar dish. All the bones were broken open revealing the savage preference for the marrow, which is so common among uncivilized peoples.

During the brief operation of the factory, on Whaleback alone, the more or less complete skeletons of six human beings were found. Only two of these showed signs of ceremonial burial, being near the top of the second mound. These appeared to have been buried after the abandonment of the place. Some copper beads and broken pottery were next to the remains. The other four were quite different, in that they were lower down in the heap and seemed to lay as they had fallen, without any beads nor other ceremonials. Shells, like all the rest, had simply accumulated over them. Their skulls were very broad and in deep contrast to the skull formation of the American Indian. It is difficult to account for these bodies in the mound as the very ancient Red-Paint Indians, who had no connection with the more

Mr. Edward Cornelious Holmes, promoter of the 1886 *project to extract lime from the shells. The factory burned on November* 15, 1891.



Mr. Gamage, his son Albert and workmen, standing before the deposits of "Whaleback."



General view of a portion of "Whaleback" with workmen. Barrels at the right were used to contain the relics found.

Solomon Sidelinger and Joseph Barstow stand beside a portion of "Whaleback" Mound during processing of the shells in 1886-1891.

Abram Tarr Gamage, right, his son Albert sitting, beside the rolling contour of "Whaleback" Mound.

John Barstow, rear; Waterman Stetson, right; Edward Arnold, front; view the steep banks of shells during the 1886 *excavations.*

modern Indians, also had their regular burial places, and it is unlikely that even savages would bury their dead in the refuse from feasts. The prospect of cannibalism can be discounted, as in this case the bones would be broken and scattered far and wide.

These ancient peoples cannot be wholly acquitted of cannibalism, however, as there were some broken bones among the assortments, which were originally from humans. Broken short and split lengthwise, they show the unmistakable and successful attempt to get the marrow and, moreover, when found, they were in such location and surroundings as to prove they once occupied a prominent place in the aboriginal soup.

The pottery which was excavated showed a remarkable similarity to the type found all over the eastern part of the country. It was crude and poorly made and was mostly of round bottoms and from six inches to a foot in diameter. The bottoms were about an inch thick, but the sides were thinner. They were made of a mixture of clay and shells. Some had holes which indicated the possible use of a bale or handle. The lower down they were in the strata of shells, the poorer the quality and design, as well as preservation. In the middle and upper strata they were of far better quality and showed a decided advance in design, beauty and workmanship.

Through the whole vast excavation it is not surprising that great quantities of implements were not found, as these places were simply kitchen-middens and the place of food refuse. We would, therefore, expect little else than broken pots and discarded bones together with the cast off shells.

The scientists who have examined this area believe there are other vast deposits near by, which have not been discovered and point out the discovery of Whaleback as an example of undisputable evidence.

The size of the oyster shells in these deposits excite the imagination. Nothing like them have ever been found in recent times. They range from a foot in length to nearly twenty inches. One shell was taken from the upper strata of Whaleback which measured one foot long and eight inches wide. It was originally over sixteen inches long. The one unfortunate oyster who inhabited this shell would fill a pint measure. Most shells were single, from the fact that they were split for eating and the two parts thrown aside.

Considerable speculation has been made on the number of cubic feet contained in this great deposit. One eminent authority, Doctor Jackson, who was State Geologist of Maine, and informed on such calculations, used his formulas and arrived at the figure of forty-five million cubic feet of shells. His computations were vigorously disputed by authorities and a consensus of those claimed about five million cubic feet.

One authority has made some interesting mathematical calculations relative to these five million cubic feet of shells. He notes that it would take one hundred freight trains of forty cars each to transport them. He found they would contain over three million gallons of oysters, which would fill a structure three times the size of Bunker Hill Monument, and there would be enough left over to fill the great Tun of Heidelberg Castle in Germany, six times, this being the equivalent of four thousand and eight hundred hogsheads. In addition, there would still be enough left over to provide a feast for every Indian in the United States at that time.

The theories as to the time of origin of these deposits are confusing and vague. The stratas of mould account for over eleven centuries of abandonment, but there is no way to compute the period of occupancy of the three races who found and consumed this great supply of food. It is certain

however, that it was in the dim ages of antiquity. Some argue that it was the Phoenicians; others that it was the Norsemen. The Eskimos have their adherents and there are those who argue for the Danes, as similar kitchen-middens were found there. A more logical conclusion seems to be that it was the ancient inhabitants of this continent, whoever they may have been. Here, again, we confront other authorities of great repute who prove that the American Indian of which we know so much, had no origin from other tribes or from foreign people.

One of the most illuminating works on this subject is the volume by that undisputed authority, Mr. Daniel G. Brinton, entitled, "The American Race." He proves conclusively that these American Indians had nothing in common with the Eskimos, or races which might have migrated from Asia. It leaves one in a state of confusion and little to conclude. This excellent work by Mr. Brinton is urgently recommended to the reader.

So much has been written of the Red-Paint Indians who preceded the American Indians and positive assertions by all authorities that they had no connection, that we are without any basis of conclusion to presume who these ancient peoples might have been at the shell heaps. Those of the first layer of shells are a mystery, but when we learn that Mr. Gamage collected a whole jar of "red-paint" from the middle strata of shells, while he was supervising the excavation, it points to the Red-Paint Indians. No one has informed us of any reason why this ancient race used these iron pyrites or ferrous oxide, to cover the bodies of their dead, and, furthermore, our American Indians know no more of this practice than we do. It is also very evident that the American Indians knew less of the Red-Paint Indians than we do.

We may reliably conclude that there were races previous to the Red-Paint Indians who were the first to discover

these oysters and it is quite certain that the second layer of shells were in the Red-Paint era and the last, the American Indians. There is considerable to justify these conclusions which are, that somewhere back in the dim and ancient past, mother nature provided a great source of food in the river which was later called the "Damariscotta." Whatever race of humans were the first to discover this gastronomical paradise, is a mystery. It is evident that there were three eras, the first being unknown, the only evidence being that it was some race of humans who had bodies which required nourishment and digestive organs such as we, to assimilate food. They came, they ate, and they departed. From where they came or to where they went is a profound mystery and we shall probably never know. After hundreds of years another race appeared, which we may presume were the Red-Paint Indians. They came, they ate, and they went. After another interval of several centuries another and third race appeared which we may presume with more accuracy, were the American Indians.

It is about three hundred and fifty years since they ceased to live here and from that time to this, mother nature has been busy with her endless task of obliterating the remains of human activity at these shell heaps. That so much remains and so much is visible, is evidence of the enormity of the original deposits.

There are abundant evidences that oysters grew and thrived in the river at great distances from the deposits. One place of considerable extent was Oyster Creek. This small stream leads from the great bay to the farming lands beyond and is some two miles from the deposits. Another small inlet at the head of the bay was known as "Little Oyster Creek." There were many found here also. It seems very evident that they grew over quite an area of the river bottom, yet all the deposit of shells was within an area of one quarter of a mile at the bend of the river. As late as

1895, live, healthy edible oysters were taken from Oyster Creek. Mr. Gilbert E. Gay procured a supply from there for a novelty supper the men of the Damariscotta Baptist Church held at that time. They were not as large as the ancient variety, but of excellent flavor.

An experience of the author will serve to amuse the reader and shed considerable hisotrical light on the extent to which these oysters propagated in the river. Shortly after the year 1900 A. D., the United States Government appropriated funds to dredge the Damariscotta River at the immediate approach to Cottrell's Wharf. Tug boats, barges and a dredge came up the river and began operations. This location was immediately below the present bridge on the Damariscotta side of the river.

It was soon learned that the barges were to be dumped in Fitch's Cove, about five miles down the river. The more daring and resourceful boys, of which the author was one, were quick to attempt ways and means of riding up and down the river. To our surprise, there was no objection and we were among the first to get on the barges and were there when the first shovelful came up from the river bottom.

An unexpected thrill came to us when we observed great oyster shells in remarkable preservation, were imbedded in the mud of the river bottom and there they had remained below tide water for many years. Like all boys, our immediate impulse was to jump into the scow, grasp a souvenir and get out before the dredge brought up another load. Again, to our surprise, there was no objection and we soon collected remarkable specimens. There were many other interesting experiences connected with this work but we are at present concerned with the oysters of the Damariscotta River.

In due time a report reached Washington that unusual specimens of oyster shells were being taken from the

Damariscotta River. Word was sent to Captain Frank Smithwick, who was Custom's Officer at the time, to obtain a supply of these shells. A notice was sent out to the boys to bring in their souvenirs and that real money would be paid for those selected. There was a general parade to Captain Smithwick's office. We came with carts and boxes, bags and bundles, and Captain Smithwick soon found he had a wide variety to choose from.

After considerable examination he selected quite an assortment and began passing out money. One of the shells which the author had been fortunate enough to find, was an excellent specimen and consisted of both sides intact and remarkably preserved. The sides fitted perfectly and the whole was slightly curved as though it had grown adjacent to a rock. This shell measured exactly eighteen inches from tip to tip.

Turning his attention to me, Captain Smithwick put his hand on my shoulder and said he would like to buy this shell, and in his kindly way, asked me the price. After over fifty years, I feel compelled to admit that I looked him over, wondering how much I could charge. Once I had the momentary and desperate impulse to say fifty cents, but my courage failed me and I dared not mention such a huge sum of money. He smiled, hesitated, and presented me with a piece of paper money. It was nothing I had seen before and I looked at it and then at Captain Smithwick, still wondering if it was real money. Another hasty glance revealed the figure five on it. I concluded it must be money but still had no idea how much.

The other boys profited handsomely during the visit and we left the office confused, as we began to suspect we all had more money than we had ever seen before. One and all made a beeline for the grocery store of Mr. Charles M. Jones across the street. On entering the door I beheld,

directly before me, a great glass case full of dates. Then and there I decided I wanted dates. Mr. Jones did quite a business for a while and when he approached me, I had my gaze still fixed on that case of dates. I can vaguely remember that he asked me how many I wanted. My answer was to produce that piece of paper money, which I had been holding with such a grip that it was crumpled in my hand. He had reached for a paper bag, but laid it aside for a larger container, which he filled with an enormous quantity of dates and took the money. I was perfectly satisfied, in fact, I thought I had better get out before he discovered he had made a mistake, as it didn't seem that little piece of paper was worth so many dates.

Leaving the store I was soon joined by the other boys and we all made haste to get over to the old boat house for a feast. We spread out our purchases and what an assortment it was. There were peanuts, licorice, walnuts, cookies, cheese, and every variety of candy, and plenty of dates. The next half hour was spent in gobbling up everything in sight. Had this been a contest, I think I should have won the two events of eating the most and eating the fastest, although I had real competition.

For some reason or other most of us began feeling sick. This began to assume the proportions of an epidemic, as the other boys were stricken and we all struggled to get home. I was put to bed and severely scolded. Father learned the particulars and polished up the hair brush in a most effective place and I spent the next few hours meditating the tragedy of the oyster shell.

This rather amusing experience is interesting to relate as it discloses that all the vast area of the river bed below the bridge was filled with large oysters and shows that they must have grown over a wide area of the river in those ancient times. How far down the river they grew is un-

certain, but there is one smaller deposit on the southern end of Cottage Point a mile below the village.

There is some possibility that oysters would still grow in the river. It is said that there are live oysters, at this time, in what we call "Johnny Orr." There may be live ones in Oyster Creek to this day, but they are few and far between. It is known that they were indigenous to the coast of Maine, as well as more northern waters as far as Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Cape Breton. This is probably true as shell heaps have been found in all these places.

There is a persistent story that when the first settlers began dumping sawdust into the river, it caused the decline and eventual extermination, but I rather lean to the theory that as time went on the waters of the Gulf of Maine became cooler, and conditions no longer favored the propagation. This seems creditable as they gradually died out until today none are found north of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where the water is known to be warmer, due to the influence of the Gulf Stream pressing the Arctic current into the Bay of Maine. Some natural changes took place which made the ideal habitat of this delectable food, no longer suitable to its original breeding ground and it must either move or be exterminated. The present day oysters of Cape Cod are tasty, and of their types, the Cotuit seems largest and enjoys our personal preference, but it seems almost unbelievable that they could be descended from the enormous specimens which grew in the Damariscotta River in ancient times.

One reputable work on the history of these Damariscotta oysters, is most complete and was the result of years of research and exploration, but I note with keen interest how the author avoids making a partial guess at the date of origin of this mysterious landmark. A most conservative estimate would be that it was previous to the Christian era and quite probably antedating B.C. by centuries.

Whoever were the first people to discover this abundant supply of food, and at what remote time it was, will most certainly remain a mystery forever. How long the primitive savages made use of this facility is beyond conjecture. From a standpoint of all the Indian Tribes, and the comparatively limited area where these oysters grew, centuries must have been required to complete these enormous heaps.

One authority mentions that a computation based on taking enough oysters from the water every hour, to make ten gallons of them ready to eat, would take seventy years, using every hour of daylight during the whole time, to make an accumulation of so vast a quantity of shells. The periods of abandonment would have to be reckoned and they alone, would account for over eleven centuries when no oysters were taken.

The purpose of this work has been to relate all that is authoritatively known of these enormous heaps of shells. It would be interesting to speculate on a possible date of beginning, when the first humans discovered these edible shellfish and gathered their first meal, casting the shells carelessly on the ground which had not known them before. This is indeed a mystery.

How intensely interesting it would be to know what contemporary events were taking place elsewhere on this earth. Perhaps it was in that ancient time about 460 B.C. when by a strange coincidence the Athenians were marking their own oyster shells to signify the exile of Aristides. Perchance it was a remote day compared to which the ostracism of the noted Grecian was but as yesterday.

Far far away in the remote pages of unwritten history, lies the answer. Present generations may speculate in only wild calculation and conclusions. There is neither the opportunity to declare, nor authority to dispute the findings of a sage of Neophite.

There lie the remains of the past, concealing the silent evidence of antique previousness.

There only, today, as it was in the beginning, runs the never-ending ebb and flow of the tide waters. Silently we glide past the tranquil surroundings, bourne on that same tide which carried the ancients. However wild and active the scenes once witnessed in this little valley, now all is silent. The great host of dusky forms which we see in retrospective and panoramic vision, are now only part of the dust we tread at every step.

Pausing a moment on the shelly bank, beneath the shade of great pine trees, we speculate on the historic past of this area. Before us the silent river passes its waters. Overhead a sea gull drifts majestically, seeming to defy the very laws of gravitation. To the eastward we note the low circling of a hawk. A bird twitters softly near us in the thicket. Shaded shores are nearby and pretty coves beyond. All is serene and silent.

We gaze at the shells all about us. We pluck a spray of Jewell weed or possibly a lone primrose. Far to the right a blue heron stands silently peering into the water. The picture is momentarily quickened by a flock of active sandpipers, who dart by on their swift and unerring flight. Vainly we look about seeking some clue by which we may look down the corridors of time to those far off days and find the answer to this great mystery. Our only answer is the faint whispering of the pines and a tranquility which seems to draw the curtain of the past forever closed to the actors and drama of this great historical area.

As the sun dips in the west we slowly arise from our musings and with a gentle effort, launch our little craft and slowly and silently float down the river to the village where modern ways absorb us in the present and blot out further meditation on this mystery of the past.

OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

The Story of Ancient Pemaquid

The Story of The Great Salt Bay
and Vaughn's Pond